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## THE CERTIFICATE OF AN APOSTASY DURING THE PERSECUTION OF DECIAN.

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*Discovery of the Libellus.—Text and translation.—Peculiarities of the text.  
—Restoration of it.—Historic value of the Libellus.—Conclusions.—Literature.*

A COLLECTION which is now giving some workers in the Berlin Museum trouble and pleasure is the so-called "Brugsch Collection," which was purchased and presented to the Museum by the Emperor in 1892. It consists of a great mass of documents which were unearthed in the Fayûm and which have chiefly to do with the first three centuries of the Christian era. The work of editing was begun at once, and is under the care of Doctors Wilcken, Krebs, and Viereck. Several hundreds of these manuscripts have been published as deciphered by these scholars, under the title *Urkunde des Berliner Museums: Griechische Abteilung*.

Recently Dr. Krebs deciphered a large part of a rather ragged little papyrus which he dated June 26, 250 A.D. It was apparently a legal document of some sort, but for some time after he had deciphered it it was not recognized as possessing any especial value. Suddenly the idea—one of those happy ideas that the searcher of the minute details sometimes enjoys—struck him that this papyrus was one of the often mentioned, but unknown "libelli" which first came into use among the apostates of the persecution of Decian. A minute investigation of the papyrus, and the references of the church fathers to "libelli" of this class, soon proved with certainty that he had at hand the original application of a suspected Christian for clemency on the ground of compliance with the edict of Decian.

The neglected little papyrus became an object of interest. Professor Harnack talked about it in his "seminar." Dr. Krebs

presented it on November 30, '93 before the general session of the Berlin Academy of Science. In short this little scrap of papyrus which the Egyptian sand has kept for us for fifteen hundred years is an important contribution to our knowledge of the church of the time of Cyprian.

The text reads as follows:

- Τοῖς ἐπὶ τῶν θυσιῶν ἡγῶν  
 μένοις κώ(μης)<sup>1</sup> Ἀλεξ(άνδρου) Νήσου  
 παρὰ Αὐρηλ(ίου) Διογένου(ς) Σατα-  
 βούτος ἀπὸ κώ(μης) Ἀλεξάνδ(ρου)  
 5 Νήσου<sup>2</sup> ὡς Λοβ, οὐλ(ῆ)  
 ὁφρὺι δεξ(ιᾷ). Καὶ ἀεὶ  
 θύων τοῖς θεοῖς διετε-  
 λεσα καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ πα-  
 ροῦσιν ὑμεῖν κατὰ  
 10 τα προστετατα(γμέ)  
 να ἔθυσα [κα]ὶ ἔ[σ]π[εισα]  
<sup>3</sup>[κα]ὶ τῶν ἱ[ε]ρείων [ἐγευ]  
 σάμην καὶ ἀξιώ ὑ[μᾶς]  
 ὑποσημώσασθαι.  
 15 Διευτυχεῖται.  
 Αὐρήλ(ιος) [Δι]ογένης <sup>4</sup>ἐπιδ[έ](δωκα)].  
 Αὐρήλιος σ . . ρ[. . .]  
 θύοντα Μυσ[θης]  
 . . . νωνος σεσ(ημείωμαι?)  
 20 <sup>5</sup>[La] Αὐτοκράτορο(ς) Καί[σαρος]  
 [Γα]ίου Μεσσίου Κ[ο]ίν[του]  
 [Τρ]αι[ανου] Δε[κ]ίου Εἰσ[βούς]  
 [Ε]ὑτ[υχούς] Σε[β]α[στου]  
 Ἐπ[εὶ] φ[β] β<sup>-</sup>

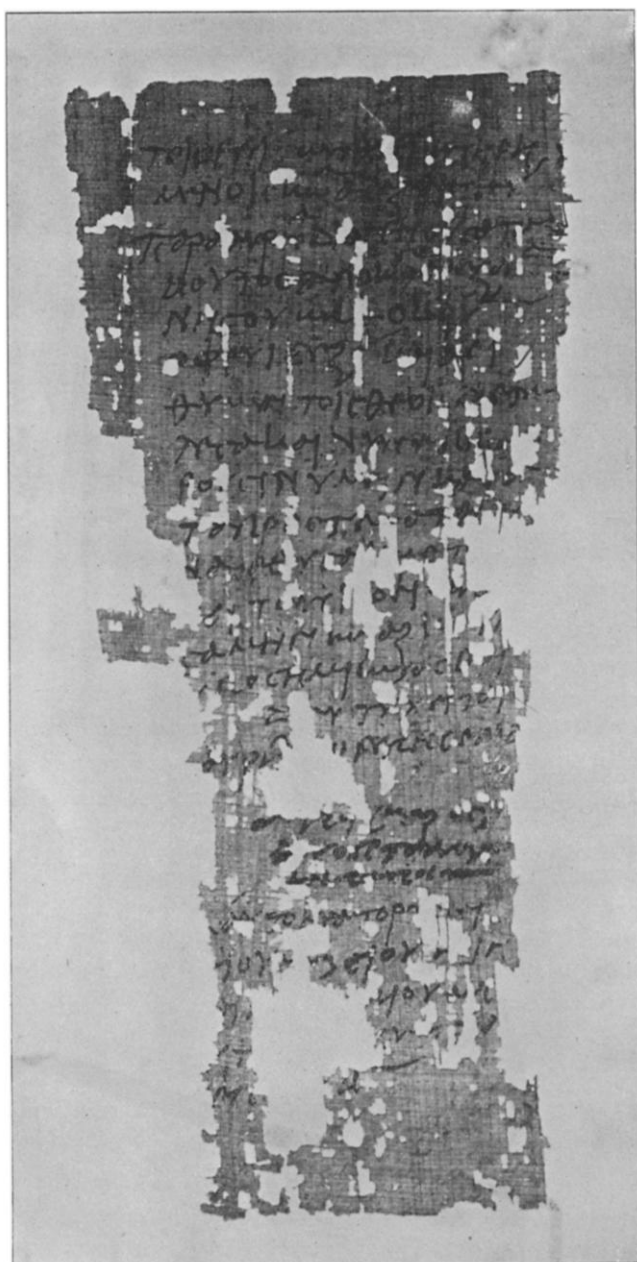
<sup>1</sup> Parentheses indicate abbreviations.

<sup>2</sup> Read: ὡς ἐτῶν ἐβδομήκοντα δυοῖν. L = ἐτῶν.

<sup>3</sup> Brackets contain what is lacking in the papyrus.

<sup>4</sup> On the papyrus the word was written ἐπιδε or ἐπιδδ.

<sup>5</sup> La = ἔτους πρώτου.



THE LIBELLUS

"To the commission on sacrifices of the village Alexander's Island  
 "from Aurelius Diogenes, the son of Satabas (a native) of the village  
 "Alexander's Island, seventy-two years old (with) a scar over the right  
 "eye-brow: As I have always, hitherto, been in the habit of offering  
 "sacrifices to the gods, so have I also now in your presence, according to  
 "the edict, offered sacrifices, poured libations, and eaten of the  
 "consecrated food, and I beseech you to bear witness by your attest.  
 "I salute you. I, Aurelius Diogenes, have made this application.  
 "I Mus(thes), son of — (have seen) Aurelius sacrificing, and hereto  
 "set my seal.

"In the first year of the Emperor Cæsar Gaius Messius Quintus Trajan  
 "Decius Pius Felix Augustus. Epiphi. 2."

#### PECULIARITIES OF THE TEXT.

A single glance at the reprint of this papyrus shows us that lines 17-19 are from a different hand from that which wrote lines 1-16 and 20-24. The latter is written clearly with evident pains, and is apparently the work of the old man himself. He was doubtless in the habit of writing Greek in business and was familiar with the usual abbreviations. The phraseology which he must use for the occasion (lines 6-14) he would have no difficulty in procuring. More weighty than these probabilities, however, is the fact that in very many instances among these Fayûm papyri, it appears that the applicant had been unable to write, and a friend had written it for him. This is generally indicated. Such phrases as, "I, Arpagathes, wrote for them as they cannot write,"<sup>1</sup> and "I, myself, wrote for him who is uneducated,"<sup>2</sup> indicate that where another hand did the writing this must be indicated in order to make the document legal. We may be assured, then, that we have the handwriting of Aurelius Diogenes.<sup>3</sup>

The other three lines are written hurriedly, and are thick, indistinct, and official. They remind one of the modern Turkish

<sup>1</sup> *U. B. M.*, No. 153, l. 42.

<sup>2</sup> *U. B. M.*, No. 152.

<sup>3</sup> These facts constrain the writer to dissent from the opinion of Dr. Breasted that lines 17-19 were written by a clerk. In the *Evening Post* (New York) of January 20, 1894, he writes: "The document itself shows that the clerkly hand that wrote it had written hundreds like it."

official who puts a few ink blots on your passport, and then makes mud of it by the use of a teaspoonful of sand. Unfortunately for us this Roman official did much the same thing, and left us an almost illegible, although almost perfectly preserved specimen of his handwriting. We may be reasonably sure of three words, however, and each is important. The first is the name of our applicant, Aurelius. The second is *θύοντα*, "sacrificing," which is the object of the verb. The third is the abbreviated form of the attest indicated by "σεσ-". From these three items, we reach the conclusion that the official put his seal to the fact which Diogenes affirmed in his application, namely, that he had fulfilled the law and offered sacrifices to the gods. The orthography corresponds to the common colloquial forms then current: *ει* and *ι* are interchanged, as in *ὑμῖν* and *ὑποσημιώσασθαι* (lines 9 and 14), and *αι* is put for *ε* in *διεντυχεται* (line 15).

The text is without breathings and accents, except over *ν* when it is initial, or stands before *ι*, the diæresis is used. These conditions obtain generally with manuscript of this period and place. The usual abbreviations occur, as *κω* for *κωμης*, *Αλεξ* for *Αλεξανδρον*, etc. An interesting slip of the pen occurs in line 10, where the syllable *τα* in *προσ τεταγμενα* is carelessly duplicated.

#### THE RESTORATION OF THE TEXT.

The papyrus had lost two important parts. Parts of lines 11 and 12, 17 and 19 were missing. Professor Harnack rearranged and conjectured that lines 11 and 12 should be restored as I have already indicated in the text. He reasoned that the "things commanded" of line 10 indicated more than one act of obedience. The edict had prescribed something more than mere sacrificing. Cyprian often refers to the eating of flesh offered to the gods. Therefore, the edict contained a clause requiring this act of obedience, and the verbal stem which preceded *αμην* he conjectured to be *εγυσ*. But libations were also very common, and formed an element in worship which the "impious Christians" must be made to recognize. The other verb would naturally have reference to the libation and would be either *επιον* or *εσπεισα*.

Curiously enough, after the Berlin papyrus was published, a second "libellus" of the same sort appeared in Vienna.<sup>1</sup> It contained the formula found in the Berlin papyrus in lines 6-14. Here the word *εορτεια* is very clear and *εγευσαμεθα* is a most reasonable conjecture. The validity, therefore, of Professor Harnack's conjecture is thoroughly substantiated. The other hole in the papyrus (lines 17 and 19) is not so easily patched. The sense, however, is very clear. It contains the official attest, that Aurelius Diogenes had fulfilled the demands of the edict in the presence of the commission on sacrifice. In the Vienna papyrus this latter part, the attest of the commission, is entirely lacking.

With these preliminary questions settled, we are now ready to proceed to the interpretation of the text itself. A little study of this will readily convince us that it is a "libellus" with which we have to do. The official character of the document is very plain. There is in it the formal address to the commission, and sufficient description to make sure of the identity of the libellaticus. In the Berlin papyrus this is especially true, for in addition to the name of the applicant, his father's name, his age, place of residence, and the peculiar scar, which could neither be imitated nor removed, are all mentioned. The form of the application, too, conforms to the legal customs of the time. It begins with the usual form, "To" so and so, "from" so and so, and ends with the *Διευτυχείτε*—I salute you. A similar formula is used in many acts, death notices, etc. The Libellus contains the stereotyped formula, "I have always sacrificed faithfully to the gods, and so now in your presence, according to the edict, I have also poured libations, and eaten of the sacrificial flesh. On this account I beseech you to grant me a certificate to that effect." Then follows the signature of the applicant—which was often given by proxy; the attest of the commission was added to this application when granted and the date, which was perhaps the same for both papyri, but was in any case 250 for the Berlin papyrus, closed the document.

<sup>1</sup> See note at the end of this paper.

## THE HISTORIC VALUE OF THE LIBELLUS.

We have, then, before us a document of sufficient importance to characterize a whole class of apostates. Cyprian<sup>1</sup> made us acquainted with the name long ago, but the libellus, which gave the name libellaticus to him who used it, is now for the first time before us. The Decian persecution was not confined to the leaders of Christianity. Decius determined to destroy absolutely the strange religion. Every Christian, humble or exalted, was to be persecuted until death or apostasy resulted. First the edict was issued.<sup>2</sup> In Egypt it reached the "Epistrategien," then the "Strategien," and finally the villages. The net was so closely drawn that an especial commission was appointed in every locality and the commission was strengthened by five officials of the given district.<sup>3</sup> The first duty of this commission was to search for all Christians or suspected Christians. They then demanded that all such should prove their loyalty to the religion of the state by offering an especial sacrifice. It was this commission before which our Diogenes presented himself, or at any rate his *libellus*, and which he addresses as: "ἐπὶ τῶν θυσίων ἡρημένοι κώμης Ἀλεξάνδρου Νήσον."<sup>4</sup>

Now if Diogenes were a Christian, and had not conformed to the requirements of the edict, persecution awaited him. If, however, he could produce a certificate that he had offered sacrifice and poured libation he would be free. Modern political conditions point to the same solution of the difficulty as ancient political conditions produced. Some magistrates were quite willing to profit financially because of the persecutions, and *libelli* were bought and sold in a quiet way.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand

<sup>1</sup> On Libelli and Libellatici in general. See Cyprian Ep., 20:2; 55:3, 13, 14, 17, 26; 67:1, 6. *De Lapsis*, 27, 28, *Ep. Romana ad Cypr.*, 30:3. See also *Petri Alex. can.* 5.

<sup>2</sup> But Eusebius (*Ch. Hist.* VI, 41:1) quotes Dionysius of Alexandria: "With us the persecution did not begin with the issuance of the royal edict, but anticipated the edict by a considerable time."

<sup>3</sup> Eus., *Ch. Hist.* VI, 42, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Lines 1 and 2 of papyrus.

<sup>5</sup> The following references argue, if they do not prove, such sale: *Cyp. Ep.*, 21:3;



the magistrate profited by the sale; on the other the suspected Christian paid for the privilege of the peaceful observance of his religion without having offered sacrifice or in any way compromised his conscience except by having given a bribe in the purchase of the *libellus*.

This Diogenes is now a *libellaticus*. He is in a strange plight. He is on good terms with the commission, while his neighbors are being persecuted. He had never offered sacrifice, but held a certificate of having done so. He had never denied his faith, but he was not suffering because of his loyalty. How was he to be regarded by the church?

Aube<sup>1</sup> classifies the apostates of the period into *sacrificati*, *thurificati*, *libellatici*. The last class comprises those who had made or had caused to be made for them a declaration of apostasy. This was apostasy of the second degree because (*a*) their crime was less and (*b*) they cared for faith more than for money. Their crime was that they allowed themselves to pass in public as apostates.<sup>2</sup> "Apostasy," says Harnack,<sup>3</sup> "was apparently treated very summarily until the middle of the third century. Even then we find Cyprian questioning the possibility of readmitting apostates.<sup>4</sup> In 251 the church machinery was put in order.<sup>5</sup> The conditions of readmission were various. Between *sacrificati* and *libellatici* was a wide space. Not only the act but the various conditions and circumstances were considered in the basis of decision."<sup>6</sup> Cyprian seems to summarize the matter in these words: "Therefore it was decided, dearest brother, the case of each individual having been examined into, that the receivers of certificates should be readmitted."<sup>7</sup>

55: 14, "*pro se dona numeravit*," "*dare me ob hoc premium*," and Tertullian *de Fuga*, 5: 12, 13, "*periculum mummis redimere*," "*tributum sibi irrogare*."

<sup>1</sup> *L'église et l'état dans la seconde moitié du III<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, Paris, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> For minute classification of *libellatici* see article by Hefele on "Abgefallene" in Wetzer and Welte's *Kirchen-Lexicon*, 2 Aufl., 1882.

<sup>3</sup> Article "*Lapsi*" in Herzog u. Plitt, *Real-Encyc.*, 2 Aufl., 1881.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Fabius in Eus. *H. E.* VI: 43, 44, Dion. of Alex. in Eus. *H. E.* VI: 44-46.

<sup>5</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 55.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. McClintock & Strong, *Encyc.*, Art. *Lapsi*, *Libellaticus*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ep.* 55: 17.

## CONCLUSIONS.

This *libellus*, then, of which Professor Harnack says, "Every lover of early church history will take hold of it with deep feeling" has thrown light upon certain mooted questions.

1. Since the whole *libellus* except the attest of the magistrate is written in the same hand, the question whether giving (*tradere*) or receiving (*accipere*) it was the crime is settled.<sup>1</sup> The giver was also the receiver of the same document. The giving it then to the magistrates was the crime of apostasy.

2. We have the exact terms of the requirements made in the edict of Decian. This explains how men, women, and even nursing children suffered punishment for having eaten things offered to idols.<sup>2</sup>

3. We know better than before how definitely the persecution was accomplished through (*a*) strengthening the local officials by a commission of five, (*b*) the severe punishment threatened those officials who failed to enforce the edict<sup>3</sup> and (*c*) the careful search for and identification of individuals.

4. The peculiar character of the apostasy of a *libellaticus* is now perfectly clear. We can understand the temptation, the apology to conscience, the procuring the form, the presentation of it to the magistrate and the result. We sympathize with the apostate in his public position, a Christian without a church, almost as solitary as "the man without a country." But we can follow him as a penitent and see him readmitted to the church.

Read in the light of this *libellus* the whole question "*De Lapsis*" is fraught with new interest and through it the discipline of the early church is better known.

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On the *Libellus* as a whole see Sitzungsberichte der Königl. Preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, 30 Nov. 1893. Also A. Harnack's review of "Ein *Libellus*, etc." in *Theologische Literatur-*

<sup>1</sup> Justin, *Apol.*, I : 29.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cyprian, *De Lapsis*, 25 with the fifth edict of Maximian (308) in Eus., *De Mart. Pal.* IX : 2.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa in *Vita Greg. Thaum.*

zeitung, 1894, Nr. 2. Also *Zeitschrift für Aegyptische Sprache* Band XXXI, "Neues aus dem Fayûm, etc.," von Fritz Krebs. Also James Henry Breasted's article on "The Latest Papyrus," in the *Evening Post* (N. Y.) Jan. 20, 1894.

The Vienna papyrus was published by Dr. Karl Wessely, Professor in the *Staatsgymnasium* in the third district in Vienna. Its size is 9.6 by 10.4 centimeters. The text is as follows:

Τοις ἐπὶ τῶν θύσων ἡρημένοις  
 κωμῆς φιλαδελφίας  
 παρὰ αὐρελίων συροῦ καὶ πασβείου τοῦ  
 ἀδελφοῦ καὶ δημητρίου καὶ σαραπιάδος  
 γυναικῶν [ἡ]μῶν ἐξωπυλείτων  
 αἰὲν θύον[τες] τοῖς θεοῖς διετελε—  
 σάμεν καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ παρόντων ὑμῶν  
 κατὰ τὰ προσταχθέντα καὶ ἐσπισάμεν  
 καὶ [τῶ]ν ἰ[ερείων] ἐ[γενε]μαμεθα διο[  
 ἀξιούμεν ὑμᾶς ὑποσημειώ  
 σασθαι ἡμῖν [space for six letters] διεντ[υχ]εῖτε]  
 (and in another hand)  
 αὐρηλ συροῦ καὶ πασβῆς ἐπιδέδωκ  
 ἰσιδωροῦ ἐχρς ὑ αὐτ ἀγρς